

Return to School 2021: Teaching in Alternative Learning Environments



Please note: This resource is meant to complement and enhance the recommendations and guidelines provided by Public Health. If you are unsure about any situation, please contact your public health unit for specific guidance.

Latest update: August 20th, 2021

PHE Canada connected with Thomas B. Doherty, a proud Métis Nation Ontario citizen and M.Ed., OCT, to learn more about how to integrate land-based education, outdoor education and alternative learning environments into your classroom this fall.

INTRODUCTION TO ALTERNATIVE ENVIRONMENTS

During the recent pandemic, teachers moved classrooms outdoors out of necessity only to find that teaching physical education opened up all sorts of new and exciting teaching and learning opportunities. You can use this as an opportunity to get creative - as physical education can be taught anywhere - particularly outdoors.

While finding alternative spaces within the school for physical education, it is important to **work with your administration, fellow teachers, custodial staff and other support workers to ensure safety and clear communication**. Engaging in these critical planning conversations now around using these alternative spaces will allow your school community to schedule and plan these alternative learning spaces in advance. **Invite your team to work with you whenever and wherever possible.**

Once you have established the facilities that are available for use, survey the spaces and determine which types of activities are best suited for each. This is likely not the first time the gymnasium has been otherwise occupied, and you have always been able to **think of creative ways to engage your students**. Below are some key areas of focus in constructing your lessons, activities and units in alternative settings.

A background image showing a group of students in winter gear walking through a snowy field with snow-covered evergreen trees in the background. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

***“Physical Education is not called Gym for a reason
- it can be taught anywhere.”***

- Dr. Doug Gleddie, University of Alberta

URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

Teaching physical education outside is not always feasible. Depending on where your school is located, even tarmac spaces can be limited.

Here are some general guidelines, questions for consideration, and helpful tips to help you navigate the waters of teaching in alternative environments if your school is in an urban setting:

01. Look at your existing physical education space and rethink what may be possible. **Can new temporary areas be created using painters tape?** Can the walls be made into targets? Can corners be used more effectively for various games?
02. **Cafeterias:** Is this school space now more open due to less seating space? Is there now less foot traffic in your schools' cafeteria? If so, have a conversation with your administration about **moving some of your physical education lessons to the cafeteria.**
03. **Auditoriums:** What can be done along the aisles? Using the stage? **Can you teach a seated dance lesson using the seats in the auditorium?** Are you able to use the stairs for fitness activities? Consider inviting an Indigenous Elder to your school to teach traditional dances (Grass/Hoop Dancers), or teachings done as a "Reader's Theater". This will provide your students with a greater understanding of Indigenous culture by providing a visual and hands-on learning of what is being spoken of by the Elders.
04. **Change rooms:** Can spaces such as old changerooms be used for your lessons with smaller class sizes? What **other unused spaces** can be utilized for your classes?
05. **Less used hallways:** Is there a hallway that is rarely used? If so, could this become a space for some of your physical education lessons?
06. Look outside your school for **outdoor spaces** such as local parks, community centres or empty parking lots. Can any of these be accessed with appropriate approval and permission?
07. Consider developing an outdoor classroom space using log seats. A Seated Circle is a wonderful way to set up a class discussion and foster a sense of community. Look for grants and funding opportunities such as this one: <https://www.infrastructure.gc.ca/chci-iccs/index-eng.html> to support the development of these outdoor spaces.

OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Outdoor Education is often a part of the Physical Education curricula across Canada. Although it is often taught on a camping trip, or in remote areas, **several of the skills can be taught within the school grounds or surrounding areas**. Incorporating these types of skills into your PHE classroom may take some more planning and preparation. Consider connecting with outside organizations such as Boy Scouts or Girl Guides for tips on how to get started. Always **check your board or division's safety standards and policies** before planning an activity and be sure to get proper permission if you are taking students off site. When selecting activities, be cognizant of your school's, and individual students', access to equipment and required materials. Select only **activities that will enable all of your students to participate, equally**. If additional equipment is required, look for grants that many enable you to purchase it.

We recommend starting with very basic outdoor education lessons to start. These may be done on site or in a nearby green space. Think about how you can modify each activity to fit your school community. If equipment isn't available, can modified equipment be made by students?

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES	ADVANCED ACTIVITIES
Hiking/Power Walking	Fire building
Snowshoeing	Canoeing
Orienteering	Kayaking
Geocaching	Outdoor cooking
Fort/Shelter building	

In Canada, utilizing the outdoors for physical education is key to building healthy, resilient students who are both confident and competent movers in multiple environments. Canada has four very distinct **seasons which provides students with a variety of different learning experiences**, all year long.

Use these distinct seasons when planning your lessons. Getting students outdoors in all seasons will contribute to their confidence in getting active all year long.

Tom Doherty, in Red Lake, Ontario, does the following activities with his students:

FALL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Berry picking • Harvest birch bark • Make mini birch bark canoes • Orienteering • Snare Rabbits 	WINTER <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ice Fishing • Net Fishing • Build Lean-toos • Cross Country Skiing • Winter Survival techniques • Accompany a trapper on their trapline 	SPRING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fishing • Net Fishing • Build Lean-toos
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If large open spaces aren't available at your school, take your students on a nature walk around your neighbourhood and integrate cross-curricular learning experiences into your physical education class, such as:

ACTIVITY	CROSS CURRICULAR CONNECTION
Yoga lessons	The Arts - Dance
Meet an Elder or have someone special in the community do a "Read Aloud"	Health Education / Oral Language and using Learning Skills
Learning the various word of things they see on their walk like trees and benches in French or Ojibwe	Language
Playing hopscotch on the sidewalk	Math
Write or tell a story, take pictures of students' physical fitness journey	Media Arts/Literacy
Draw a picture or collect items from the walk to use as in a collage or visual art piece	The Arts - Visual Art

LOOSE PARTS PLAY

Loose parts play encourages students to develop their own games and activities, through unstructured time with any collection of objects. The loose parts can be found (sticks, pinecones, stones, bottle caps, etc.) or purchased (counting blocks, small toys, pom poms, etc.) and challenge your student to think about how best to engage with the materials. There is no right or wrong way to play. Giving students the time and space to explore will help them to become more creative thinkers, problem solvers, and foster a sense of wonder.

Loose parts play can be done anywhere, and is very effective in outdoor environments. Ask students what they can find around the yard that is similar and have them make their own loose parts collections. If students are sharing loose parts, be sure to properly clean and sanitize before and after each use.

Loose parts play has traditionally been utilized in unstructured environments outside of physical education. With some thoughtful planning, loose parts play can be a meaningful physical education opportunity for students. Use an inquiry-based learning approach to allow students to develop their own goals and objectives - ask guiding questions along the way to keep students thinking about what, why and how they are interacting with the loose parts. Giving students the freedom to direct their learning will help to establish a sense of control for them, a very important aspect of this year's return to school plans.

“Giving students the time and space to explore will help them to become more creative thinkers, problem solvers, and foster a sense of wonder.”

WEATHER CONSIDERATIONS

Across Canada, each school and school district may have **varied policies** when it comes to weather considerations, especially when it comes to outdoor learning.

To ensure safe learning experiences for your students, if you have questions or concerns related to the weather conditions in your area and how it can affect your lessons in the alternative environment, we recommend **consulting with your administration team on a weekly or daily basis**.

If possible, ask students to **bring additional outdoor gear** (rain boots, rain coat, hat, mittens, etc.) to leave at school. This will minimize the risk of contamination from transportation to and from school. Consider asking your administration if the school can purchase **additional clothing** to assign students personal kits to be left at school. Additionally, to **increase knowledge of the seasons** and weather, invite Indigenous Elders to come into the classroom and have them provide a Teaching about how various animal furs were and are used for clothing or how traditional ways of knowing can be used to predict the weather. Once students are familiar with these Teachings, have younger students participate in animal yoga with the animals they learned about, and older students try modified hunting or archery skills. This will help to apply their Teachings within a PE context.

During inclement weather, think about using a **classroom environment/indoor area** to have a Community Elder come in to provide a valuable local perspective as to the evolution and traditional way of harvesting, or provide information as to the local environment and how post-contact has affected the region and traditional way of life. Be sure to respect cultural protocols such as presenting the Elder with tobacco when asking them to provide teachings and a small honorarium should be given upon the completion of their Teachings. If you are unsure about the protocol, ask - and take the time to learn, respect, and follow the protocol.



LAND-BASED EDUCATION

Land-based education encourages students to develop a connection with the land beyond their classroom. By doing this, students are able to better engage with their environment, which will better support the development of lifelong movers - one of the many goals of physical education. If you are new to land-based education, **start small and reach out to local Indigenous organizations for support***. If you are able to, begin by contacting a local Friendship Centre, Métis Community Council, First Nations Band Office or Inuit group to establish a connection with an Elder who may be able to come in and provide Professional Development to a School Staff and then allow their expertise of the land to accompany a class on a field trip.



Tom Doherty, current Northwestern Ontario Kenora Catholic District School Board Ojibwe Teacher (St. John School) and former Keewatinook Okimakanak Board of Education (KOBE) Student Retention Lead, is with 3 students from North Spirit Lake First Nation's Victoria Linklater Memorial School Land-Based Delivery Program. (2017)

Contact your provincial PHE Association for Health and Safety protocol for outdoor activities that can be utilized in a Land-Based Education Program.

Indigenous Peoples have developed **specific concepts, practices and standards of care** that are derived from and used on the land, which commonly aim to maintain **spiritual, emotional, mental and physical wellness**. Land-Based Education can be considered as a lifelong learning skill set, which enables students to develop and apply a particular skill set that will be with them for a lifetime! If you look at it from the perspective of the Anishinaabe, Land-Based Education is as essential to who they

are as a Peoples, which allows the Anishinaabe to be 'ONE' with the land. Mother Earth provides for all our needs and these Teachings are an important component to knowing how to **live in harmony** with the land and take on the responsibility of stewardship of the land.

Land-Based Education can be as simple as taking students out on the land to harvest berries, learn

**When incorporating Indigenous knowledge into your teaching, be sure to follow proper protocols and be inclusive all groups. The information shared here is one component of Indigenous culture and should not be taken to reflect the diversity of all Indigenous cultures.*

archery, or go hunting. There are both Traditional and Modern Ways of approaching Land-Based Education. Both present an opportunity for Educators to obtain “expertise” from a local contact. Researching and establishing a relationship with someone who has expertise is the first step in creating a Land-Based Education Program for your classroom.

Contacting and engaging with local Friendship Centres, Métis Community Councils, First Nations Band Offices personnel, or Inuit groups is a great way to establish a rapport with Elders. Elders can provide your students with required Teachings prior to going out on the land and gaining hands-on experience.

TRADITIONAL	MODERN
It is essential that Elders accompany your class on their outing to provide the expertise and Teachings of the <i>Traditional Ways</i> . This also provides an historical perspective of how things changed through time because many of the <i>Old Ways</i> were passed down orally from generation to generation.	Contacting and utilizing local Trapper’s Associations, Regional Ministry of Natural Resources & Forest (MNRF), local Conservatory Associations, local Horticultural Associations, or Hunter & Safety Course personnel are excellent resources to provide your student with Modern Ways of providing expertise of laws and regulations and current/recent information about gaining hands-on experience in Land-Based Education.

Please do not hesitate in contacting Tom to hear about his Land-Based Delivery Program experience or if you have any questions about planning your own Land-Based Education Program - tdoherty@kcdsb.on.ca.

AQUATIC ENVIRONMENT

If your school has access to an aquatic environment such as a pool; **now more than ever**, this space for learning needs to be maximized. Here are some tips and considerations for planning and teaching physical education in an aquatic environment:

- Plan to have at least $\frac{1}{2}$ **capacity in your aquatic space** in order to follow public health guidelines.
- Ensure the **pool deck is well marked with signage** for safety and physical distancing.
- Create a schedule that **prolongs the aquatic unit** to include additional learning pieces around topics like water safety, advanced aquatic skill training, etc.
- If change rooms are still accessible, consider adding signage inside the change rooms as well as **plexiglass spacing and/or creating individual change stalls**.
- If change rooms are unavailable, consider having lessons that are within the pool space, but not necessarily in the pool. For example, can you teach a water safety lesson on the edge of the pool deck? Can you teach some **swimming concepts** without asking students to get into the pool?
- These spaces also provide a great opportunity for students to learn how to canoe/kayak, cast a fishing line, or set a fishing net.

If you are teaching a lesson in the aquatic environment outdoors, please ensure you have **proper risk management protocols in place** before bringing your class to this space. Special considerations need to be taken to **ensure optimal learning and safety**. Indigenous Elders also have ways to “Read the Land” to know when conditions are safe or not, such as knowing by the colour and texture of the ice to determine if the ice is safe to travel on.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spotlight Series - Alternative Environment Activities in PE: More Important Now than Ever
https://phecanada.ca/connecting/events/phe-spotlight-series • Outdoor Council of Canada Resources For Fresh Air School
https://www.outdoorcouncil.ca/Resources-for-Fresh-Air-School • Lifesaving Society Guide to Reopening Pools and Waterfronts
https://www.lifesavingsociety.com/media/324917/98guide_reopening%20pools_waterfronts_final%20-%20june%202020.pdf • PHE Canada - Fundamental Movement Skills | <p>Alternative Activities and Pursuits
https://phecanada.ca/programs/fundamental-movement-skills-series</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality Lesson Plans For Outdoor Education Textbook by Dr. Andrew Foran
https://books.google.ca/books/about/Quality_Lesson_Plans_for_Outdoor_Educati.html?id=f9JBRzt97RIC&redir_esc=y • Natural Curiosity - University of Toronto Press
https://wordpress.oise.utoronto.ca/naturalcuriosity/ • Recommended Resources to Support Outdoor Play - Lawson Foundation
https://lawson.ca/op-resources/ |
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With respectful acknowledgement that the land where PHE Canada's National Office is located is on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg People.